

**PLACE**

Sfax, Tunisia

**DATE**

10 June 2020

## **UNHCR saddened by tragic loss of lives off Tunisian Coast, concerned by rise in sea departures**

**SFAX – UNHCR is deeply saddened at reports of 34 bodies retrieved from the sea by Tunisian authorities at the large of Kerkennah Islands, off the coastal city of Sfax, from a shipwreck occurred between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of June. The authorities have been alerted on 9<sup>th</sup> June by fishermen who first spotted the floating bodies.**

According to the first reconstructions of the incident, most of the passengers were women and young children from sub-Saharan African countries. Victims' identity can only be confirmed following DNA tests that are ongoing.

The boat allegedly departed from Sfax with 53 people on board, heading to Italy. Tunisian authorities, with the help of diving units are still searching for the other passengers. Sfax general prosecutor opened an investigation to determine the circumstances of the incident and identify the smugglers.

Between January and May 2020, sea departures from Tunisia to Europe have been four times more than the ones recorded in the same period last year. A growing number of people engaging in sea crossing are from West African countries, followed by Tunisians, who constituted the majority until last year.

"I am deeply saddened to hear of women and children losing their life in those perilous journeys" said UNHCR Tunisia Representative, Ms Hanan Hamdan, "and concerned about this new trend in departures. We need to provide people with meaningful alternatives that can prevent extreme choices in the search for a better life."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:**

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